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FOOD INFORMATION

Office of Information
U. S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D. C.

May

Farm Labor Campaign

No. 14

Shorts and Fillers on Farm Labor

THINGS THE FARMER CAN DO ABOUT LABOR

Plan your work for greatest efficiency.

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Make sure each family worker is used to best advantage.

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Use surplus labor from the neighborhood if any is there.

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A 4-H girl or some other girl from town might relieve your womenfolks of house duties.

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Fix up all the labor-saving gadgets you can for the barn. They save time.

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Shift the feed bin to a central location to save steps.

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Make sure all your implements are in condition to avoid breakdowns.

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Talk your problems and plans over with your county agent now, long before you will need labor.

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Fix any sagging gates. Arrange portable fencing so you can move it without a major operation.

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Plan the jobs on your farm to find those which can be done by women.

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See if you can split up your chores so you can do those requiring skill and knowledge, using some of your time to direct less skilled labor, either school children who are working part time, or others.

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Make a list of all the things you do, all the steps you have to take in doing each chore. Then rub out those which are step users and time wasters. Simplify your work and cut down your need for help as much as you can.

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Have your neighborhood leader call a meeting of your neighbors to plan all the work in the neighborhood for the full season. See how many jobs can be done by the old-fashioned pooling method, how many need to be handled by custom work. Then arrange your schedules as much as possible so you can help each other, or have the custom rig work the whole neighborhood at one time. Both these steps will save labor.

FULL-TIME LABOR

Your new full-time labor can't step right into the hired man's shoes and go on from where he left off. It'll take a few days to get used to your methods and your equipment. But they will have skills.

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There is a good farmer living and working hard on a hill farm in eastern Tennessee. It's hard soil from which to wring a living. But he's a good farmer. Given good soil like yours and horizontal fields instead of his vertical hillsides, you'll find he's just the man you wanted.

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This Women's Land Army, you say. Well, the English farmers tell us that city women make good tractor drivers and dairy hands, and until the war is over and the men come back to bomb-marked farms, they'll take the women. With unskilled help, English farmers last year increased production 30 percent, getting an average of 39 bushels of wheat per acre. Maybe we should give the Land Army a fair trial.

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Many a good farm hand who went to a war plant has found that the high money that attracted him follows the pattern described by W. Shakespeare--"All that glitters is not gold." Though he takes in a lot each week, he puts out a lot more, for poorer food than he had on the farm, for clothing, for laundry, for rent. Some of them have trickled back to the farm. How long since you wrote the hired man who left you for a factory?

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Your county agent is your center of information and help. He has the latest news from Washington and the agricultural college. He will know if the United States Employment Service has any farm help registered at the nearest center. He has helped you for years with production problems, and the labor shortage is just another occasion for you to ask his freely given assistance.

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You probably don't like the idea right now -- most farmers don't -- but often a girl who has been taking short courses in farm work will turn out to be just as good a worker as a girl who has lived on a farm all her life. Besides, she probably has had office experience and can help you with your farm accounts, records, and reports.

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The best pool of full-time labor is right on the farm -- the farm family. Have you planned your work to make it easy for them to help? Have you thought of getting a hired girl to do the housework so mother can apply her skills on the farm?

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We can't waste any of our good manpower. Have you wondered if the way you did things was really the easiest? The easiest way, you know, is often the most efficient. Why not ask the county agent to look over the place and get his suggestions about field lay-out, about the working line in the buildings at chore time, and about the gadgets and timesavers that lighten the burden and put more minutes in every hour.

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Wonder if we couldn't adopt industry's trick? We started defense work with a shortage of machinists. We needed 20 where we had 1. So they broke each job down into 20 simple parts and let the machinist do only the precision parts of the job. It takes a skilled eye, too, to watch a poultry flock. Couldn't less skilled hands feed and water, collect the eggs, grade, clean, and pack them?

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We might even put a production line in the dairy barn. How many minutes does it take to walk from the cow to the cooler and back? If a boy is carrying for three or four milkers, how many extra cows could be handled?

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SEASONAL HELP

U. S. Crop Corps workers will be skilled in their city jobs as you are skilled in your farm job. They have the ability to learn quickly. They are patriotic, or they wouldn't volunteer for farm work with its long hours and hard toil in all kinds of weather. They are coming out to help you do your really tough job at a time when we need peak production under all sorts of restrictions. Americans have always been good at teamwork and they'll be good this time.

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A boy of 17 looking ahead to Army duty will realize how critical his farm work is and you can expect him to do his share, given proper guidance. Show him how to do things, don't just tell him. He speaks a different language from the farmer. Words like streetcar, subway, delicatessen, phone booth, and the like are familiar to him. Words like plow, harrow, cultivator, fertilizer, seed, and spray fall on his ears and leave no impression. He'll learn fast, though.

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Have you exhausted the possibilities of the nearby villages and towns? Your county agent may know of individuals who have volunteered to come out on the farms and work all summer. In many cases you can get housewives whose husbands are in distant war plants to help with a lot of the spring work. They may be a little soft, but any housewife worth her salt knows how to work. Keeping house is no easy job, as your women folks can tell you.

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USES offices will have registered as farm help all men and women who have applied to them and indicated that experience. Your county agent will know the situation at the nearest USES office, and a phone call to him will save you many miles of driving. Your county office should be used as never before.

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Many States are letting high school youth out of school earlier this year when they have a farm job. Vermont farmers found in 1942 that these city boys made good hands with a little help and fatherly advice. Some of them have practically adopted the boys. A husky footballer with a patriotic desire to help is a lot better than no help at all. Maybe the first one you get won't fit in with your family, so ask your agent to find you another. Has every hand you've ever had been entirely satisfactory? Give the boys a break and you'll find they really can help.

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Manicurists picking peaches, file clerks feeding hens, waitresses "dishing it off the arm" to cows. Sounds strange, doesn't it? Yet it is working in England, and it can work here. A girl who can drive a car can be a whiz on a tractor. She needs a little help at first, a little checking from time to time. Farm girls drive tractors--why can't city girls?

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How long did it take you to learn to use the milking machine? Will you allow a city girl the same length of time, or possibly a little longer? If you will, you'll find many hours of your precious day freed for more important jobs that only you can do. And while you're doing it, why not see if you can't organize the milking job for more efficient operation?

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Housewives are going to be good workers in packing plants, and freezer and canning houses. When a rush crop comes in and must be processed quickly, these women are going to be the means of saving the crop.

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The migrants you used to depend on for your harvest probably won't be around this year. They are working on farms in their home areas, or are in the Army, or working in war plants. A new type of migrant is going to be available though, perhaps not as farm-wise, but more enthusiastic than any laborer you ever had.

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Office and factory workers are offering to give up their vacations to work on your farm during harvest. They feel it is their patriotic duty. Some of them are farm girls who moved to the city years ago. Others have never seen a farm except from a speeding car. They have one thing that money can't buy--an enthusiasm that comes from rendering a patriotic service to our country. They're not coming out for vacation; they're coming out to work. Go easy on them the first couple of days, though, they'll be learning about muscles you forgot you had.

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Women's clubs, civic organizations, schools, and colleges are already organizing battalions of U. S. Crop Corps "shock troops" to meet your needs for field hands. They will be ready to come out for a day, a week, or a month, until your crop is all harvested and packed. Many of them have worked on farms before. All are full of pep and ready to help lick a tough job. Some will sit at the grading tables and packing lines, others will be in the field and orchard, but all of them will work together to save your crop.

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There is one man in your county who will know where harvest hands can be found in the quantities you need. He's your county agent. He knows what towns and cities near you have organized harvest labor, whether it be just for week ends, for work after regular hours of work in the city, or to come and live in your quarters and stay on the farm for several weeks.

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We're not thinking of bathtubs and lace curtains, but have you looked at your living quarters lately? Do they need fumigating? Would a good cleaning out make them just a little more livable? Would a coat of whitewash and some window netting make them look more homelike to a person who is used to a neat city apartment. Contented workers are better workers. Labor efficiency means more than so many boxes packed in an hour, it can also mean a worker who wants to pack so many boxes because he or she is satisfied with the little things of life.

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A housewife spends about a quarter of her day working in her kitchen, either preparing food or cleaning up after the meal. About the only difference between that and a canning plant is the volume of food handled and the need for more hands and more equipment. A woman peeling peaches for a salad isn't too different from a woman peeling peaches for a can.

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What happened last year with harvest labor? Well, when everyone understood everything, the only thing that happened was that the crop got in. In some places the rate and method of pay was not arranged beforehand, transportation and feeding were not clearly agreed upon, hours of work were left to annoy both farmer and worker. But in every place where these things were all straightened out before the season started, nothing happened except the farmer were happy because they made their crops, the labor was happy because a good job had been done without friction. How about you?

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More than 300 years ago Americans found they could do more by working together. Once in a while we forget about this and operate as individuals. But neighbors, especially farm neighbors, have always been ready to help out when someone is sick or disaster strikes through fire or storm. In ordinary times town and city people tend to grow apart, but a war brings them back together with a bang that will be heard in Berlin and Tokyo.

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Cooperation means working together. Town and country worked together last year in many areas to save crops threatened by harvest labor shortages. Machinists from railroad shops worked short shifts and then went out to wheat farms to work till sundown. Whole towns closed down for the day to send merchants, bankers, housewives, and children out into the fields to gather a crop before it spoiled. That was a spontaneous effort brought about by a real emergency.

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Emergency help has been organized through the winter, or at least the plans have been made to gather everyone able to work when another emergency strikes this year. Town people are food-conscious. Rationing has hit a place just above the belt which makes them conscious of the importance of crops.

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When the going gets tough, call on your county agent. He knows which towns have organized "panzer" divisions to strike rapidly wherever the battle line is too tough. He knows where he can get help for you on notice of an hour or two. He knows the leaders to call to send the word scurrying down the phone lines, to get the busses ready for loading, to get the schools closed if need be to send the older children out to your fields. Talk it over with him before the need arises.

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You know, there is going to be a lot of satisfaction to farmers to find out that the town and city people really are human beings. Maybe you hadn't begun to doubt it, but weren't they sort of remote from your everyday thinking? You'll find out that the fellow who comes out with a white shirt on and low shoes really has the same kind of muscle rippling softly under the shirt that you have; that he has the same kind of mind you have, even though he may think in percentages or inventories; that he has a common thought with you--licking the Axis, and quick.

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